Character Development on the 2004 School Report Card
Evaluation Brief

The 2004 South Carolina (SC) school report card is the first school report card to include a character development indicator. This evaluation brief explains the events leading up to the first-time inclusion of character development on school report cards, including the development of the character development scoring rubric; describes the scores reported for the 2004 report cards; and addresses the validity of the scoring rubric. A copy of the character development scoring rubric is available on the SC Department of Education's web site at the address provided at the end of this report.

Background

On both the 1998 and 2000 *Skills That Work* surveys administered by the SC Chamber of Commerce, over 400 employers placed integrity and honesty at the top of a list of skills valued in the workplace. Schools are environments that can nurture positive character traits; therefore, in the spring of 2002, the SC Chamber of Commerce requested that a character education indicator be included in the annual school report card. The request for a character education indicator was referred to the SC Education Oversight Committee (EOC) and to the SC Character Education Partnership Team, a diverse group of school and community representatives who serve in an advisory capacity to the SC Department of Education.

Over the next two years the Partnership Team worked in collaboration with the EOC to develop the report card indicator. The term *character development* was chosen to be the designated construct to be assessed rather then *character education* because the former was consistent with the intended focus on both planning and addressing the character development of students while the latter had come to imply the specific approaches used to do so. The Partnership Team developed a scoring rubric that assesses five dimensions integral to a comprehensive approach to character development:

♦ school-wide character integration
♦ school-wide planning
♦ school-wide professional development
♦ assessment and evaluation
♦ school-community partnership

Principals are asked to rate their schools on each dimension using a five-point rating scale, from zero to four points. Specific definitions are provided for each point value within dimensions. The mean of the five scores across dimensions provides the score used to establish the school's character development rating. The ratings and associated score ranges are listed below.

Rating	Score Range
Excellent	3.6 to 4.0
Good	2.6 to 3.5
Average	1.6 to 2.5
Below Average	0.6 to 1.5
Unsatisfactory	0 to 0.5

Before the scoring rubric was finalized, a pilot study of the instrument was conducted by the EOC. In January 2003, the scoring rubric was mailed to the principals of a sample of 171 schools; 118 completed and returned the rubric for a response rate of 68%. The results of the pilot administration raised questions that were addressed by the Partnership Team, resulting in a few minor revisions to the scoring rubric, and provided the basis for establishing the scoring ranges for the report card rating. For more information on the pilot study, please contact Jo Anne Anderson, Executive Director, of the EOC.

Character Development on the 2004 Report Card

The character development scoring rubric was incorporated into the summer data collection coordinated by the SC Department of Education. The summer data collection is used to collect report card data not provided by other standardized reporting systems. All schools except career and technology centers (N=1067) reported character development scores as part of the summer data collection. **Table 1** displays the mean (average) and modal (most frequently occurring) scores for each of the five dimensions. While the modal scores were on the high end of the scale— 3 for school-wide planning and 4 for the other four dimensions—the mean scores were more moderate, ranging from 2.26 on assessment and evaluation to 3.40 on character integration. In fact, for every dimension on the rubric, the actual scores reflected the range of possible score values.

Table 1. Mean and Modal Scores for the Five Dimensions of Character Development

Character Dimension	Mean	Mode
Character Integration	3.40	4
Planning	2.60	3
Professional Development	3.05	4
Assessment and Evaluation	2.26	4
School-Community Partnership	2.90	4

The mean responses suggest that schools are strongest in the area of school-wide integration of character development efforts and professional development in support of such efforts. Schools are also relatively strong on engaging the community as a partner in their character development efforts. School-wide planning and assessment and evaluation are areas with the most opportunity for improvement. Successful integration of character development throughout the curriculum generally depends on significant coordinated planning and evaluation activities. Thus, it is interesting to note that the former has been so highly rated while the latter both need attention.

As shown in **Table 2**, the patterns noted across the character development dimensions for all schools tend to be borne out when the data are examined by school level. One difference is that the relative order of the dimensions shifts at the high school level with school-community partnership (2.73) preceding rather than following professional development (2.66). Another interesting characteristic of the data is that the mean scores decline across all five dimensions as grade level increases. This finding is consistent with anecdotal reports suggesting that programs addressing character development are more prevalent and easier to implement in elementary than in secondary school settings.

Table 2. Mean Scores for the Five Character Dimensions by School Level

| Character Dimension | School Level | | |
	Elementary	Middle	High
Character Integration	3.57	3.19	3.11
Planning	2.74	2.45	2.34
Professional Development	3.25	2.88	2.66
Assessment and Evaluation	2.47	2.02	1.92
School-Community Partnership	3.02	2.77	2.73

As shown in **Table 3**, the mean statewide character development rating score was 2.84. As would be expected based on the scoring patterns across the five character development dimensions, elementary schools had a higher mean rating score than did middle or high schools. The mean rating scores for elementary and middle schools were both within the good rating category while the high school mean fell at the cut point between the average and good categories. **Table 4** provides the distribution of the mean rating scores across the five rating categories. Well over half of the schools (65%) were rated in the good or excellent categories, and less than one percent were rated unsatisfactory.

Table 3. Mean Character Development Rating Scores by School Level and for All Schools

School Level	# of Schools	Mean
Elementary	616	3.01
Middle	230	2.66
High	192	2.55
All Schools	1067	2.84

Table 4. Frequency Distribution on Character Development Rating Scores by Rating Categories

Rating	# of Schools	% of Schools
Excellent	320	30.0%
Good	376	35.2%
Average	278	26.1%
Below Average	85	8.0%
Unsatisfactory	8	.7%

Validation of the Scoring Rubric

Because of concern about the self-reported nature of the ratings, we validated the scoring rubric as thoroughly as possible, through appropriate statistical analysis of the ratings and on-site document reviews and informal observations in randomly selected schools. Pearson's correlations were computed to determine if there were statistically significant correlations among the five dimensions of character development. As indicated in **Table 5**, there were significant relationships across all the dimensions, and a factor analysis yielded only one factor containing all five dimensions. These findings are consistent with those from the EOC pilot study referenced earlier in this report.

Table 5. Correlations Among Character Development Program Dimensions

Character Dimension	Character Integration	Planning	Professional Development	Assessment & Evaluation	School-Community Partnership
Character Integration	1	.413*	.418*	.418*	.399*
Planning	.413*	1	.423*	.606*	.393*
Professional Development	.418*	.423*	1	.544*	.412*
Assessment & Evaluation	.418*	.606*	.544*	1	.529*
School-Community Partnership	.399*	.393*	.412*	.529*	1

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

In September and October of 2004, members of the Partnership Team visited schools to conduct document reviews and to observe the school environment to determine if the scoring rubric accurately reflected the school's character development efforts. A convenience sample of fifteen school districts was selected based on proximity to the team members who volunteered to conduct the visits. All of the team members conducting the visits (n=15) received training prior to the visits and used standardized review forms.

Each team member received a list of schools reflecting a randomly drawn pool of schools from his or her assigned district. The team member then contacted the schools in the order in which they appeared on the sampling list to seek their participation, stopping once a school agreed to the visit. Of the fifteen schools that were visited, eleven (73%) were the first school appearing on the sampling list. Three of the reviewers made visits to the second school on their respective lists, and one visited the third school on the list. To ensure that refusals did not bias the results, we compared the mean scores of the sample to that of the statewide data. There were no significant differences between the statewide data and the sample on the five dimensions or on the rating score. The review sample also was representative for school level, including nine elementary, three middle, and two high schools.

While at the school, the reviewer was particularly interested in examining documents such as strategic plans, curriculum materials, training records, agendas, and reports that were indicative of the school's character development efforts. The reviewer also informally observed the school environment for indications of an emphasis on character development. Finally, the reviewer could choose to conduct an informal interview with the school principal or other designated staff. After the visit, the reviewer recorded his or her level of concurrence with the self-reported scores for each character dimension, denoting either agreement or that the score should have been higher or lower than reported.

Table 6 shows the scoring concurrence of the Partnership Team members who visited the schools. The highest degree of concurrence was on the professional development dimension (79%), while the lowest was on assessment and planning (50%). When reviewers did not concur with the schools, they were more likely to suggest that the scores should have been higher than that they should have been lower. The high percentage of reviewer concurrence and the percent of reviewers assessing higher scores than reported suggest that schools are accurately reporting their level of integration of character development programs and activities and are possibly underrating their efforts.

Table 6. Percentage of Partnership Team Members Concurring with Scores

Character Dimension	Scoring Lower	Concurring	Scoring Higher
Character Integration		71%	29%
Planning		71%	29%
Professional Development	7%	79%	14%
Assessment & Evaluation	14%	50%	36%
School-Community Partnership		71%	29%

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings reported in this evaluation brief support the validity of the character development scoring rubric currently being used on the statewide school report card in South Carolina. The level of cooperation among school principals, both in terms of their willingness to participate and the reception afforded the team members conducting the visits, further suggests that there is growing interest in the rubric across the state.

The specific findings that the dimensions of planning and assessment/evaluation were rated the lowest while character integration was the highest warrant special attention and interpretation. There is still room for improvement in terms of how well character development activities are integrated into the entire school culture, and improvement in planning and assessment/evaluation will likely lead to gains in integration.

The following recommendations emerge from the findings:

1. Continue to provide technical assistance to local school districts to further their understanding of what comprehensive character development integration is and how it is positively influenced by school-wide planning and evaluation.

2. Continue to use all five character dimensions of character development to enhance clarity and focus for those providing the ratings.

3. Provide more focused technical assistance and support to middle and high schools across the state.

4. Continue to monitor the reliability and validity of the scoring rubric.

For more information about this evaluation brief and the evaluation of character education, contact:
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For more information about the pilot study contact: Dr. Jo Anne Anderson, Executive Director, SC Education Oversight Committee, at 803-734-6148 or jander@eoc.state.sc.us.
For more information about the Character Development Indicator on the State School Report Card contact:
Joan Dickinson, Character Education Program, SC State Department of Education, at 803-734-4807
The web site for the character development scoring rubric is listed below:
http://www.myscschools.com/offices/ssys/safe_schools/character_ed/reportcardchart.doc